

Hyperstition (2024)

When I was walking on a trail with my cousin in the summer we found ourselves engaging in some sort of passing the time conversation. It was the type of exchange that's all jokes as in there was an understanding between us that everything we were saying to each other was fiction invented on the spot to sustain a bit as if we were doing an improv skit. Fragile deposits of light that passed through the leaves flickered around scattered all over the ground and across her face as well and rarely catching in her eye to light it up for fleeting moments. What we developed between each other became less nebulous as it fed off of itself like visual noise gradually rendering into an increasingly solid hallucination. We were cultivating some sort of theory about astral influence and arrived at discussing a force called "the vibes", which we understood to be like a manifestation of the pull of destiny. This is not a groundbreaking concept and we didn't get into the mechanics of it then, beyond that "the vibes come from a mystic source to facilitate the unfolding of Every circumstance in the Universe!!!???" My cousin remarked, "when inchworms go somewhere it's like, they pick up their front half and wag around for a second and then place it down, cuz inchworms don't have eyes, so when they're moving they gotta rely on the vibes...the guidance...yo." I nodded enthusiastically. It all made perfect sense. I replied, "it's like people think they have control cuz they can sense, like they can see what they want so they feel like they're in charge of going and getting it, But blind little worms can't see anything, their path is just like completely vibe based like they're incapable of defying the guidance...yo.....inchworms...are a symbol...." Together we concluded that the vibes had a mascot in tiny helpless worms with no eyes. We told each other that fate is real, it's a godlike entity, and inchworms represent it, when they seem to wander according to no incentive or rationale, they're compelled by something outside of themselves.

As we continued to follow the trail through the transient shadows cast by the trees and their shifting branches, there was green ambience in the air from the leaves filtering the light, we approached one fateful spot. In this spot there waited one ray of light streaming through the foliage as if it was breaching the firmament, catching on one strand of insect silk hanging down from the sky, and attached to the end of the strand, suspended in midair, there was one tiny green inchworm. My cousin and I stopped walking then. Like donnie darko after following the weird translucent

thing trailing forward like a rope from his chest, as if we had reached the end of the intention energy beams emerging from our chests and arrived at the destination that they had been pulling us towards, we had been compelled by something outside of ourselves. We looked at each other and understood then that the inchworm hanging from the sky in a ray of light was one of those things that seems to warrant an explanation, but can never hope to reveal one, not as long we're grasping to coherency like a life raft. So the inchworm was a coincidence then, much like a mysterious moment in 2016, when someone on 4chan posted "trump will win", and the ID number of the post came out as 77777777, and then he won. There were a lot of coincidences in 2016.

When the reality TV star Donald trump launched his revolutionary presidential campaign on June 16th of the year before then, it was considered by the general public as the kind of incident that affirms the "truth is stranger than fiction" adage. Across party lines there were those that reacted in horror or at least a certain degree of wariness at this evidence of such a strangely evolved sociopolitical climate, and others that reacted in delight, many for the fact that they found it funny that such a circumstance could actually unfold. It's unlikely that there was anyone among the spectators who expected him to make it past the first primary, and yet he did. As he continued to advance miraculously towards the oval office, those who had been horrified became more horrified, and many of those who had been amused probably stopped finding things so funny, but the remaining portion of Americans and international onlookers were utterly ecstatic to witness the manifestation of such an incredulous timeline. Among those reveling in the developments, there was a relatively obscure subgroup, a particular demographic who could be classified as the "reclusive fringe counterculturists" of the postmodern world—the socially inept, disillusioned and vengeful, chronically disenfranchised "underdogs" with fervent disdain for the establishment and the "liberal status quo" (whether their own political alignment be to the left or right of liberalism) —frequenters of the notoriously unpleasant /pol/ imageboard on the similarly ill famed online forum called 4chan. When Donald trump entered politics, he immediately became the favorite candidate of nearly everyone on the site. Counterculturists and accelerationists of all sorts saw in trump an Agent of Mass Disruption—his "outsider" status, his venture capitalist way of life, his demagogic condition, and his romancing of the right wing Christian fundamentalists of the world who felt culturally overpowered under Obama's administration and the liberal zeitgeist, all pointed to his potential as a political representative for /pol/. At last,

there was a contender in politics whose presence they could classify as advantageous to their objective, that objective being the advent of some sort of sociopolitical upheaval. And while this trump fanaticism propagated on /pol/, a more inexplicable aspect revealed itself, as the trends of /pol/ seemed to be further charged with something even more miraculous.

Ostensible Magic crops up in environments of high coincidence. As in the number one catalyst for anyone's foray into believing in mystical bullshit is a few too many coincidences, like wishing on 11:11 for your class to be canceled and then it's canceled like magic. At a certain point there's too much magic to write off, and then people start talking about "Oh....everything's.....Energy.....yea.." and then other people say "Buy my course on manifestation to create your own reality" and everyone in the comments says "Ok seems legit" to the bewilderment of all the poor sticklers still clinging to rationality—"HOW DO THESE SCHIZOS GENUINELY BELIEVE THIS SHIT??" On 4chan, there developed a culture that gives a lot of precedence to coincidence. This can be attributed to the site's incrementing number ID system: Each 4chan post is assigned a unique number ID, and on boards that accumulate posts quickly, the sequence of numbers on a given post becomes essentially a random dice roll. Because of the "pattern seeking mind" or whatever combination of psychological effects causes people to assign meaning to utterly insignificant arbitrary circumstances, IDs with notable number arrangements, such as repeating numbers at the end called "dubs", seem to contain somewhat of an increased degree of luck or magic. There developed the practice of betting on dubs or other number sequences by making a post predicting a number sequence and seeing if its ID number turned out to contain the predicted sequence. Posts that managed to successfully predict these things were called "gets", and the celebration of gets became integrated into 4chan culture. Randomly generated events that mean nothing seem to accumulate and coalesce, and then they seem to mean something.

Throughout Donald trump's campaign, there seemed to be a mysteriously high amount of trump related gets. At the same time, the rise of the term "kek" was occurring, a synonym for "lol" that randomly began to replace it on 4chan. The rise of the pepe the frog meme was occurring, a green cartoon frog that was reappropriated for inexplicable reasons as it became a meme to associate this random frog character with extremist iconography like swastikas and etcetera, symbols of social unrest and chaos. And when all these conditions blended

together in a cesspool of unregulated anonymous imageboard posts, as if opening a portal, something from a long time ago emerged from the coalescence, like it was ritually summoned out of the raging bonfire at the center of a mass of dancing chanting acolytes, when discussions began to circulate on 4chan about a deity from an obscure subsect of the ancient Egyptian pantheon called Kek. Kek, the deification of the primordial concept of darkness, the god of hiding the truth, the god of right before the dawn. Kek, a frog-headed god of chaos.

There's something called synchronicity that refers to the phenomenon of simultaneous events seeming to be meaningfully related even while lacking a discernable causal connection. The wiring of the human psyche to notice these things becomes a dangerous condition of cognitive function for people susceptible to psychosis.

People on 4chan began posting about the Cult of Kek, "ironic" "religion" dedicated to the worship of Kek and the election of Donald trump via the practice of "memetic magic" and whatever.

They came up with a prayer:

"Our Kek who art in memetics

Hallowed by thy memes

Thy Trumpdom come

Thy will be done

In real life as it is on /pol/

Give us this day our daily dubs

And forgive us of our baiting

As we forgive those who bait against us

And lead us not into cuckoldry

But deliver us from shills

For thine is the memetic kingdom, and the shitposting, and the winning, for ever and ever.

Praise KEK"

When Cult of Kek enthusiasts on 4chan uncovered an obscure Italian disco song from the 80s by an artist named P.E.P.E (Point Emerging Probably Entering), the cover art of which depicting a green frog holding a magic wand in front of seemingly a swirling portal, and the words MAGIC SOUND printed above it, it's the kind of thing that seems to warrant an explanation, but it could never reveal itself, I could never tell you what it is when we're clinging to coherency, as in this need to appeal to reason, there's really a stigma around being the one to say "I'm not crazy." "I'm not crazy, I'm awake." How does that sound. When I was walking on a trail with my cousin and we found an inchworm hanging from the sky, I took it in my hand. It was so small I couldn't even feel it on my skin unless I was looking at it. I didn't take my eyes off of it for the rest of the journey because I knew that it was so small it could disappear in the blink of an eye and be gone, so I walked for a mile or so with my hand as still as I could hold it. Eventually my mom wanted to take a family picture and I thought, for just a few seconds I can squint against the sun and maybe if my inchworm stays or if the vibes take my inchworm away it will mean something, so for a few seconds I looked up and looked at the shapes in front of me made indistinct by my eyelashes closing and the light passing through them and appearing as a diffraction pattern of many aperture stars like many small halos, everything just looked like brightness that's indistinct. Then after she took the picture I looked back at my arm and the inchworm was gone. And I turned my arm in every direction looking for it as my arm began to buzz because I didn't feel it leave, and I looked at my other arm and over all my clothes and around on the ground but the inchworm wasn't there. I wondered if I could look at the photo she took and find the inchworm on the screen, could I discern tangible evidence of how it left, if it fell or if it teleported or vanished like a magic spell, but I knew it was too small to be pictured. So when my family kept walking I had to follow them with my arms buzzing. I told my cousin about it and I told my sister about it, but they didn't seem to know what I meant, when I said this really means something. They laughed, because what else could my sincerity have been in that moment but feigned for the purpose of making a joke, because I was sane, if I was voicing the delirious assessments of an insane person it could only have been playful imitation. That was when I understood something more than I had before, a thought I had to keep to myself, that there's something real that I can never show you, and it's imaginary. I understood that imaginary things are capable of becoming real.

Last month I came to learn about something called the CCRU—the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit. Basically graduate students in the UK in the 90's on meth obsessed with feedback loops, time, chaos magic, H.P. Lovecraft, *The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar* by William Burroughs (a book that doesn't necessarily exist) wherein he explores the lost continent of Lemuria, and a lot of other things that interconnect in one of the predominant concerns of the CCRU, a concept they developed called Hyperstition. Hyperstition is the phenomenon of fictions making themselves real. According to one of the founding CCRU members, "hyperstition is a positive feedback circuit including culture as a component." It is "the experimental techno-science of self-fulfilling prophecies." In a CCRU writing called *Lemurian Time War*, it's written that "fiction is not opposed to the real, rather reality is understood to be composed of fictions—consistent semiotic territories that condition perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses." Because "semiotic territories", symbols perceived in reality, are perceptible in the same way regardless of whether they represent fiction or fact, it's only because of an imposed system of control that fictions are considered distinct from facts. By affirming themselves within positive feedback loops, fictions transmute into truths, and they exist as hyperstitional objects that aren't just figments of social construction like superstitious objects, hyperstitional objects are truly conjured into being.

I began to read about this stuff as if I was examining some schizophrenic's diary out of curiosity. Something a kid going through their dramatic adolescent existential crisis would say: "I'm always searching for something, so I look into everything, because I know if I were to find it in something it would be deep inside. I'm searching for something that feels familiar, rather than stuff that feels like noise detached from me, relevant to other people instead of me. I'm always paying attention to the unrecognizable crowd just in case so as to not miss it, a glimpse of a familiar face..." When I read about the CCRU and the semi-ironic philosophy they developed during their drug induced "theorizing" as people with too much free time, I felt it for the first time, the familiar thing was that I was always searching for. I began to recognize hyperstition as if I had met it before and had been waiting to meet it again, this time as something with mechanics and an explanation, an established host of language that worked to validate it in the way that yes men validate the egotist, and fictions validate the hyperstitional object. I felt it as it seemed to be making itself true. I read about chaos magic and they said that human attention is what casts a spell. The spells are everything around you now, if you ever walked on the beach at night when you couldn't tell the sky from the water

and you started to run without knowing why, you would have felt them as you moved. I read about a hypersigil created by chaos magicians during the 2016 election accelerated by thousands of 4chan users chanting their shared intention, such a ridiculous pipe dream that became truer and truer with every dub and every prayer to Kek as strange magic seeped out from between all the innumerable letters crowded in a digital plane, radiating from monitors and within networks and coalescing, positive feedback loops, something imaginary making itself real. If I attempt to choose between believing in hyperstition or whatever or not, I find that there isn't a choice to be made, or it was made a long time ago. I remember one thing I understood, the moment in light a long time ago and my skin buzzing out of touch with what it wanted to feel, an inchworm proclaimed an embodiment of destiny and unspoken truth cradled in my hand. Then I was never coherent again.